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YS Interview

Interviewer: Tell me the types of digital devices you are familiar with and how often you use them.

YS: I am familiar with various digital devices, but mainly I use a smartphone, a laptop, and a desktop computer. I use them quite frequently in my daily life. My smartphone is always with me, and I use it multiple times a day for communication, social media different apps. I also use my laptop and desktop computer for more intensive tasks like studying, completing assignments for my courses, and watching movies.

Interviewer: Good, Which features, software, or applications do you use your mobile phone for?

YS: On my mobile phone, I use social media apps like Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, and IMO to connect with my friends and family. And recently I've

become a big user of TikTok. I also use YouTube on my phone sometimes. On my laptop, I use video conferencing apps like Skype and Zoom to attend online classes and meetings, and Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel to process documents. I also use YouTube for entertainment and educational content on my laptop. I use various software for my studies, programming, and accessing online learning materials. My desktop is mostly for watching movies, it is a huge screen. And I also use it to play video games.

Interviewer: So far how was the integration process for you? What does integration mean for you?

YS: Integration, as I understand it, it means becoming part of the Netherlands society here. But in the meantime, retaining my cultural identity, my Eritrean cultural heritage. It involves adapting to the culture, learning the language, understanding the local customs, and engaging with the community in different events. So it is about finding a sense of belonging and at the same time contributing positively to the society I now call home.

Overall, the integration process has been challenging as you can expect going to a new country and learning a new language, and adjusting to a totally new way of life here. It took time to adjust to the new culture and language. But not only the socio-cultural aspect but for me and for many others from East Africa, the weather is also somehow a bit difficult to adapt

to. I am more of a sociable person, I like to meet and connect with new people. So that helped me get used to things here quickly.

Interviewer: How do you use digital technologies in your everyday life? Have digital skills played a role in your integration process? If so, can you elaborate on how?

YS: Digital technologies are an important part of my everyday life as I mentioned at the beginning of the interview. I use them for mainly for communication and sharing information, for educational purposes, and entertainment. They make my interactions with others easier and faster. I always say that digital skills have played a huge role in my integration. They have allowed me to communicate easily with others, have helped me access important information and updates easily, and have given me the opportunity to participate in online educational programs and workshops. On top of these, my ability to use digital technologies has given me the confidence to help fellow refugees with the Interviewer digital challenges both while I was at the camp and afterward.

Interviewer: Good, Do you feel that digital technologies have helped or hindered your integration into Dutch society? Can you provide specific examples?

YS: Well, the answer to this question seems obvious, given what I have been talking about so far. Digital technologies have mostly helped my integration process. So a good example for me is, as I said earlier language is the most important thing when it comes to integration. So I use online language learning platforms, applications, and YouTube videos that have helped me in improving my Dutch language skills. Not going to detail, if you have digital know-how, your life will be a lot easier in the Netherlands. I am telling you this because I have seen a lot of friends and people struggling to get things done in the Interviewer everyday life.

Interviewer: How do you currently use digital technologies to access information about your rights and obligations as a refugee in the Netherlands?

YS: As a refugee, that is one of the first things you learn. You learn the rights and responsibilities and expectations both as an asylum seeker and later as a refugee if you get accepted. I would say that is mostly done at the beginning by the authorities. But moving forward, such information can be accessed on IND's website or your respective municipalities website.

Interviewer: Now, Have you used any digital tools or resources to learn Dutch or other languages? How effective have these been?

YS: Definitely, I am glued to my screen every day. I average 6 to 7 hours of screen time. So, I use that to selectively see and watch content in the Dutch language and also English previously. So I use online language learning platforms as I said, applications like Duolingo have been a huge help for me, and of course, YouTube tutorials and lesson videos have also helped me learn Dutch as well as English.

Interviewer: Have you encountered any challenges using digital technologies in the Netherlands, such as language barriers or lack of access to technology? How have you overcome these challenges, if at all?

YS: Well honestly I haven't faced many challenges myself in using and accessing digital technologies. Well maybe, the fact that services, websites, and most importantly official letters are only in Dutch was challenging at first. But as I said I assist my fellow refugees in whatever digital challenges they might have. So I have seen many of them struggle using the Internet, using translation apps, buying or ordering things online, and getting and going to appointments. But of all the challenges, the most common is navigating addresses using Google Maps. Many people miss that. It is tough for Eritreans, this may not be the case if you see among Ethiopians or Somalis here. The old dictator has literally blocked the country from everything. We are able to access the internet and computer once we left the country. Language adds to it. Especially the letters which are always in Dutch. It could have been much easier if you can just take a picture and translate them on Google, but many people can't do that. Many

Eritreans also didn't own a smartphone when they first came here, which makes it difficult for them to use digital resources.

Interviewer: Do you use any online platforms or apps to connect with other refugees or people from your home country? How has this affected your sense of community and belonging in the Netherlands?

YS: Well, yes I use social media apps like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram. Telegram is definitely one of the most used apps among refugees in the Netherlands. Well if you have been to Rotterdam for example, there is a neighborhood where you can find Eritrean bars, restaurants, cafes, and shops. You will find a lot of Eritreans in the streets. For a moment you could feel like you are in Asmara. That is a physical community, and that brings them closer to each other. And at the same time, many people might be hesitant to learn the language and integrate with the Dutch because they are comfortable and in a way have brought Eritrea to the Netherlands. On the other hand, we communicate regularly. And perhaps the average Eritrean here could have more Eritrean connections than people of other nationalities. What I am trying to say is there is a sense of community here, but that is somehow isolating from Dutch society.

Interviewer: Have you had the opportunity to interact with Dutch people or participate in Dutch social events? Have you used any digital tools or platforms to connect with Dutch people or participate in Dutch social events?

YS: Yes, I have had the opportunity to interact with Dutch people through my classes and work and I attend different social events. As I said I am a sociable person and I am always looking for events and programs to take part in.

Interviewer: Have you been able to find employment since arriving in the Netherlands? If not, what are the challenges you face in finding a job?

YS: Yes I worked for two years before I start education.

Interviewer: Have you used any online platforms or resources to search for job opportunities?

YS: Nowadays I just browse, the available jobs on LinkedIn, just to see what they require in my field and so that I prepare myself accordingly.

Interviewer: Have you received any support or training to develop digital skills related to job search or job performance?

YS: Not really.

Interviewer: Do you feel that digital skills are important in accessing basic services in the Netherlands? Have you used any digital tools or resources to help you navigate the Dutch system and access these services?

YS: Digital skills are important in accessing basic services in the Netherlands. From scheduling medical appointments to submitting important documents, digital literacy is essential for navigating the Dutch system effectively.

Interviewer: Have you faced any challenges in accessing basic services such as healthcare, education, or housing in the Netherlands?

YS: Accessing basic services can be difficult sometimes because of language barriers. The Dutch system requires you to understand its bureaucracy and fill out forms correctly, which can be scary for newcomers.

Interviewer: Have you had any opportunities to attend digital skills training programs or workshops in the Netherlands? If so, can you describe your experience and how it has benefited you?

YS: No, I don't know of any training of such for refugees.



Interviewer: Are there any specific digital skills or areas of knowledge that you feel would be particularly valuable for your integration into Dutch society? Why?

YS: Integration can be simplified if you improve your language skills and if you learn technical knowledge in fields that have good job opportunities in the Netherlands. It can also help you to succeed in the long term if you know how the Dutch education and workforce system requirements work.

Interviewer: What kind of support or resources do you think would be beneficial in helping refugees like yourself in the Netherlands improve their digital skills and enhance their integration?

YS: It would be very helpful to have digital skills training, more accessible and fit the needs of the refugees, especially related to job search and employment purposes. Language barriers can be reduced by offering resources in different languages, which could also encourage more people to join.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add or share about your experience with digital skills and integration?

YS: Thank you.

